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ABSTRACT

The information in this paper aims at providing assistance to those supervisors who design accountability plans. The author (1) analyzes the frequently overlooked distinctions needed to be made in considering accountability plans; and (2) discusses the more recent tools for implementing teacher accountability. Some distinctions presented include the differences between process and product accounting and the difference between types of actions that can be taken by a supervisor should it be discovered that the expectations for teacher advancement of student learning growth are not being met. Two innovative tools discussed in the report are the supervisor-teacher preinstructional conference and a teacher performance test. (JF)

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by

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SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THEORY AND PRACTICE TO ACCOUNTABILITY

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When Lucy in Peanuts says, "ACCOMPLISH something! I thought we were just supposed to keep busy," she is reflecting the movement to accountability. Examples of this movement in education can be found throughout the nation. One prominent example is California's new teacher evaluation law mandating that in plans for evaluating each K-12 teacher there be a provision for judging the teacher's role in prompting pupil progress, i.e., there be standards of expected student progress in each area of study and techniques for the assessment of that progress.

A central concept of educational accountability is that a teacher produce evidence regarding the quality of his teaching--facts about what happens to pupils under his direction. Supervisors then must respond to this eveidence, making decisions with respect to programs for teacher improvement, salary increase, teacher assignment and dismissal. Just thinking about the personal import of these decisions as well as the whole idea of closer public examination of a teacher's performance is disquieting to many. Those in the NEA Research Division, for instance, have reported upon a survey showing that teachers with negative views on accountability outnumber those with positive views 11 to 1.

Generally, accountability is something we would rather apply to someone else. The instructional supervisor can usually find merit in accountability plans for teachers but is apprehensive about any plan the superintendent is about to implement with respect to the assessment of supervisors. So, too, the teacher who is most opposed to being held accountable for the results he is getting with pupils is often demanding in his expectation that his pupils be answerable to him for specified behavior within the classroom.

Like it or not, all of us--superintendents, supervisors, teachers, pupils--are facing mounting pressures that we render a full account of our accomplishments and deficiencies in order that society can be better served, e.g., that taxpayers gain confidence that they are getting their money's worth from schools.

As I see it, our task as supervisors is to design accountability plans that are just, to review critically those plans by which we are to be evaluated as supervisors, and to ensure that the accountability plans teachers set with pupils are consistent with the philosophy of the district. I do not believe that one can say accountability plans in the abstract are either harmful or beneficial. It depends upon the nature of the particular plan--the principles by which it is constructed and implemented. The challenge for supervisors is to try to design and carry out plans which approximate the best of supervisory theory--not to resist the notion that schoolmen must demonstrate that their instructional intents are warranted and that they are improving their capacity to achieve desired ends.

The time limitation of this presentation makes it importnat that I restrict analyses of ways to develop and execute accountability plans of high quality to the following: (1) frequently overlooked distinctions for use in considering accountability plans and (2) newer tools for implementing accountability with teachers.

Frequently Overlooked Distinctions

Relating the Accounting to Decsions. An accountability plan is not an end in itself. Something is to follow once the results are ascertained. If one is solely interested in whether to continue the services of a given teacher, he may be satisfied with a plan which provides evidence that the teacher is or is not advancing learning growth as expected. However, if one wants to make a different kind of decision such as how best to help the unsuccessful teacher improve, the plan must provide for the collection of data and analyses showing what the teacher is doing--not just what the pupils are achieving. Similarily, if one wants to make a decision as to which of several teachers to select for assignment to teach a given subject matter to a population of learners, the plan should allow the candidates for the job to provide work samples of their ability to teach identical tasks under like conditions to learners with the defined characteristics.

Accounting for Process or Product. If there were generalizable laws for guiding teacher behavior--if we knew of any teaching procedures that were valid for all classes of objectives and learners, then we could prescribe teaching methods and hold teachers accountable for following these procedures. But there are no generalizable laws. Prescription of method is likely to be inefficient whrn the method conflicts with task, personality of teacher, and characteristics of individual learners. True, there is at least one occasion when accountability for process seems appropriate. This is when there are validated programmed materials for instruction to pre-specified ends--where the responsibility for pupil gain rests with the designer of the instructional material, not the teacher. Under these conditions the teacher should be held accountable for using the materials as they were intended to be used. Materials such as IPI math, for example, require the teacher to comply with the the directions given--to assume a restricted role permitting the major burden for instructional sequencing to be carried by the material itself. With materials of this type and in order that the materials work as intended, the teacher should not innovate nor depart from the directions.

There are those who long for the day when teachers, like practitioners of medicine, will be held accountable for good practice as opposed to malpractice on the basis of what a consensus in the profession deems to be "prudent" behavior in classroom situations. The hazards associated with imposing method by consensus are many, e.g., freezing practice at a low level. Further, teachers are probably mistaken if they think they have a better chance to avoid detection as incompetent when the criteria are on the basis of process used rather than results attained. We can expect a tightening of performance requirements on process, too. There will be many unhappy teachers once those with authority to certify agree that competent teachers must do such things as: (a) pretest all learners before each lesson, (b) match instructional material according to pretest diagnosis, (c) administer post tests, (d) design or select matching remedial instructional sequences. Can you imagine parents bringing malpractive suits against teachers who have not followed some stated procedure--say in the teaching of reading--even if there is no experimental evidence (only a consensus) in support of the practice?

Many teachers want to be recognized chiefly on the basis of efforts expended--the hours given to planning lessons, preparing materials, arranging room environment. One objection to using effort as the criterion for accountability is that it is likely to be a "cop out," but not related to pupil progress. If effort is believed indeed to be related to pupil gain, then it is better to measure the gain than to document the effort.

Direct and Indirect Influence. One should not be held accountable for changes in learners unless he controls the variables known to be necessary in producing the

intended changes. This general injunction relates to a dilemma faced by those who would hold supervisors accountable for progress of pupils. Typically supervisors are at least one step removed from interaction with pupils in the classroom. The supervisor is usually dealing with teachers, not pupils, through workshops, conferences, and in providing resource materials. Nevertheless, the assumption is that because of the supervisor's work, the teacher's behavior will change and as a further consequence, the pupils will change in prespecified ways.

Confident supervisors are sometimes willing to say that by their endeavors with teachers in given schools it is possible to demonstrate that they (supervisors) make a difference in both degree and kind of outcomes achieved by pupils. Less confident supervisors want only to accept responsibility for showing that teachers have acquired new competencies after a course or workshop led by them whether or not the teacher uses the new skill in the classroom of if it contributes anything to pupil learning is more than they can say. And there are supervisors who don't even want to produce evidence that the teacher is any different after the supervisory experience. These supervisors want their performance to be judged on the basis that they presented an "opportunity" regardless of the consequences, if any.

Two Newer Tools

Preinstructional Conference. Supervisors are not only concerned with finding out that pupils have achieved, they want to know that the results are desirable. The preinstructional conference is a mechanism by which the supervisor helps teachers clarify and justify instructional intents before instruction commences. It is economical of the supervisor's time to call together early in the school year faculty groups or the entire staff for a preinstructional conference. At the conference, the teacher must indicate the kinds of outcomes for which he will be held accountable. He must specify some of the most critical things pupils under his direction will be able to do at the end of the year that they cannot do at the beginning. In order to communicate this information, a teacher will make his statements in the form of instructional objectives--stating what kinds of situations learners will be expected to meet and what observable responses they should make in the presence of these situations. Further, the teacher probably will provide examples of the kind of test, observation scale, pupil self-report form, or check-list for product evaluation by which he will collect evidence of the pupil's status on the desired objective before and after instruction.

Without instructional objectives it is difficult to assess whether teachers have or have not justifiable intents. One cannot determine that the teacher who says, "The outcome I seek is 'good citizenship'" has a valid expectation. His words are too vague to be meaningful. One can make a judgment about the expectation when stated "Given novel instances that are and are not consistent with the Bill of Rights, the learner will be able to choose those instances that are in agreement with the premises of this document."

Numerous procedures exist for establishing the validity of instructional objectives. Professor Robert B. Stake at the University of Illinois has suggested that an indication of the criticality of an objective is obtainable by weighing the probability that the objective is vital to the learner's needs, the probability that the school can do the job,

and the probability that the objective will not be reached in any other place than the school. Thae fact that the intended learners do not now possess the competency and attitudes that one purposes to teach is a factor to use in establishing the appropriateness of an objective.

I said it was economical for a supervisor to lead a group of teachers in reviewing the staff's instructional objectives. It is economical because many teachers will profit from the questions and suggestions directed at a colleague. A supervisor is wasteful of his time when he tries to confer with individual teachers regarding their instructional intents whrn the provocation he generates would be valuable to others. The group conference is economical too, in that it provides valuable by-products such as continuity and integration of instructional objectives. During the conference one instructor may decide to alter his future objectives when he sees what his colleagues intend to achieve with the same learners prior to the pupils' arrival in his class. Another teacher may see the need to give opportunities for pupils to practice in his classroom the objective being acquired from instruction taking place with another teacher.

Once staff members, parents, pupils, and others recognize clearly what an individual teacher is trying to achieve and the reasons for his undertakings, they are more willing and able to cooperate with him to that end. The sharing of materials and ideas are instances of the kind of help that will follow when somebody knows what another is trying to accomplish. Is not a supervisor to be valued when he can defend teachers from unfair outside attack because he has studied systematically with others the merits of the teacher's purposes?

A preinstructional conference using instructional objectives is likely to reveal those teachers who do not have a sense of direction, who are teaching to trivial ends, and who are teaching from habit. Identifying such persons and deciding what to do for them is a first step in the direction of accountability by supervisors.

The Teacher Performance Test. A major difference exits in particular kinds of instruments bearing the rubric "teaching performance test." Several regional laboratories in education, for instance, have prepared tests that call for teaching of mini lessons that allow teachers to display their mastery of particular "teaching skills." The teacher is said to have passed the test when he can demonstrate that his performance--processes--are consistent with some model of "good teaching." For example, during training, a teacher might be led to ask questions of a specified quality and in a given manner. Later when this teacher engages in teaching pupils during the mini lesson and observers can see that the question-asking model is followed by the teacher, then the teacher is said to have mastered this particular teaching skill. A different kind of performance test--one that is pupil centered rather than only teacher centered--has been developed by Instructional Appraisal Services. [1] Although IAS tests enable the teacher to increase his repertoire of teaching skills, these tests demand that the teacher demonstrate his ability to effect desired changes in pupils. The teacher's processes are not regarded as ends in themselves; they are means to be appraised. I favor the latter approach to teacher performance testing because it allows one to demonstrate direct linkage between (a) a recommended teaching procedure, (b) teacher employment of the procedure, and (c) increased pupil progress. The pupil's responses should be the basis for validating instruction. One should not regard display of a skill as evidence of teaching prowess when that skill is not necessarily related to pupil growth. Note, however, that both

[1] Instructional Appraisal Services. 105 Christopher Circle, Ithaca, New York, 14850.

approaches use objectives. The process approach includes objectives stated in terms of the teacher's behavior. The pupil-referenced approach states what it is that pupils must be able to achieve under the direction of the teacher as the indicator of teaching competency.

A pupil-referenced performance test typically consists of (a) a teaching task defined by a specific instructional objective and sample items of the kind of post test which pupils will receive subsequent to instruction, (b) background information about the instructional task, (c) post tests to be administered to pupils, and (d) teaching strategies sug ested for getting better results on the particular task and related instructional tasks. The instructional objective is one that pupils have not previously acquired, but is probably a task that can be mastered after 15 minutes of instruction by a competent teacher, not at all by an incompetent one. Tasks may be selected from those oriented to subject matter, e.g., foreign language, mathematics, aesthetics; generalized learning processes, e.g., creative thinking, problem solving; or fundamental skills such as reading. All tests also assess the teacher's ability to get positive pupil affective responses to the lessons.

The following is an outline of procedures using the performance tests:

1. Planning. The teacher spends about 30 minutes planning a lesson, studying carefully the prespecified instructional objective, sample test items and background information. The teacher does not see the complete post test to be given pupils inasmuch as the teacher is to teach to the objective, i.e., to teach a concept, principle, or generalizable operation, not to help the learner respond to particular test items.
2. Teaching. The teacher teaches the lesson to a group of about 8 or more learners randomly sampled from his class. The lesson is 15 minutes in length.
3. Testing. The previously unseen posi test I is given after instruction and after scoring the test, the teacher can also find an indication as to how well he has done in comparison with other teachers.
4. Analysis. If the teacher is not satisfied with the results, he consults supplementary sections in the test packet which contain (a) teacner suggestions believed to be useful in most teaching situations and (b) specific suggestions for teaching to the kind of task represented by the particular test just taken.
5. Reteaching. The teacher tries to employ the newer teaching strategies in reteaching the lesson to another group of eight also randomly drawn from the class. The teacher receives immediate feedback on the value of the new teaching practices by comparing pupil scores earned by the second group on post test II, an equivalent version of post test I, with scores earned by the first group of eight.

Opportunities exist for varying the procedures. A teacher may select a teaching task of special interest to himself and try the lessons solo without any outside observers. Or the teacher might want to work in tandem with peers where teachers observe each other teaching the mini lessons and subsequently augment the suggestions given in the test packet.

A discerning supervisor will recognize the relationship between the preinstructional conference and the performance test. The conference is where evidence is brought forward that a staff member has valid instructional objectives--that he is competent to formulate or at least select instructional ends. The performance test permits one to show that he has the skill to change pupil behavior in accordance with prespecified objectives and

provides evidence that the teacher is competent in designing and implementing strategies for getting results. Once one is assured that he is on "the right track"--that his long range intents are warranted, he can then select and teach to short-term teaching tasks that are related logically or empirically to the desired end-of-course objectives. As one increases his proficiency in attaining results with the mini lessons, he is more confident that he is maximizing his chances to bring about the desired and desirable outcomes established in the preinstructional conference . . . to attain the results for which he is accountable.